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ABSTRACT

"Learn & Live," a documentary film created by The George Lucas Educational Foundation and hosted by actor Robin Williams, profiles four K-12 school programs that are seeing positive results. In addition to these stories, the film shares insights from experts in education and technology to help explain why the innovations profiled in the film are important in helping to prepare learners of all ages to thrive in a rapidly changing, highly technological society. The film is supplemented by a 300-page resource book that includes essays from experts and practitioners, profiles, and contact information for hundreds of schools around the country that are implementing effective strategies and techniques. (LPP)

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Learn & Live: A Documentary Film from The George Lucas Educational Foundation

Patty Burness ■

Abstract

This paper discusses *Learn & Live,* a documentary film created by The George Lucas Educational Foundation and hosted by actor Robin Williams. The film profiles four K–12 school programs that are seeing positive results. In addition to these stories, the film shares insights from experts in education and technology to help explain why the innovations profiled in the film are important in helping to prepare learners of all ages to thrive in a rapidly changing, highly technological society. The paper notes that the film is supplemented by a 300-page resource book that includes essays from experts and practitioners, profiles, and contact information for hundreds of schools around the country that are implementing effective strategies and techniques. ■

Introduction

Providing the best possible education for our children often hinges on a vivid understanding of what the most effective K–12 schools and programs look like. What does effective teaching with technology look like? What does it mean for schools to link classroom learning to the world of work? How are schools transforming themselves into learning centers open to all members of the community, from kindergartners to senior citizens? And why are these innovations important in helping to prepare our children to thrive in a rapidly changing, highly technological society? This documentary film, created by The George Lucas Educational Foundation and hosted by actor Robin Williams, helps answer these crucial questions by telling the stories of four K–12 school programs that are implementing effective strategies and seeing sustained, positive results.

Program Profiles

At Clear View Charter School in Chula Vista, California, Jim Dieckmann and his fourth- and fifth-grade science students use interactive technologies in the context of a hands-on investigation of insect anatomy. Students work in teams to collect insects, use the Internet for detailed research, and prepare content-rich reports using multimedia tools. A two-way interactive video connection with a local university allows students to examine insect specimens through an electron microscope and to share observations with entomologists. This segment models teaching with technology and provides the basis for discussion of the factors that contribute to the successful implementation of technology in the classroom. Additionally, viewers will see a model of meaningful interaction between students and subject matter experts, linked via distance learning.

At Brighton High School in Boston, Massachusetts, students participate in a school-to-career program called ProTech, which enables them to connect their classroom learning with professional working environments. This film segment features the experiences of Reagan, a high school junior who works as an EKG technician at Boston's New England Medical Center. Reagan works with doctors and interacts with patients at the hospital and then brings her experiences and observations back to class. Not only is she able to develop new understandings about physiology and to share them with her classmates, but by seeing the relevance of what she is learning in school, Reagan is also able to clarify her career goals.

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In West Des Moines, Iowa, community schools are being transformed into centers of lifelong learning for the entire community. In addition to serving the learning needs of K–12 students, schools in the district are now open during afternoons and evenings, 7 days a week. Classes and workshops bring the entire community together, and residents are showing that one is never too young or too old to learn. This segment shares the experiences of one senior citizen who begins taking computer classes and of one mother who is learning computer skills from her elementary-school-aged daughter.

Shorecrest High School in suburban Seattle, Washington, offers an interdisciplinary curriculum that engages students in real-world projects. Juniors Ryan and Kevin design sophisticated computer graphics for a leading software company, applying knowledge from their math, physics, and English classes. A project manager from the company provides guidance and feedback, helping the students understand how their work can be improved.

Experts' Insights

In addition to these stories, the documentary film shares insights from experts in education and technology, such as Howard Gardner, Professor of Education at Harvard University; James Comer, Associate Dean of Yale Medical School; and John Seely Brown, Director of the Xerox Palo Alto Research Center. These segments help explain why the innovations profiled in the film are important in helping to prepare learners of all ages to thrive in a rapidly changing, highly technological society. The film is supplemented by a 300-page resource book that includes essays from experts and practitioners, profiles, and contact information for hundreds of schools around the country that are implementing effective strategies and techniques and seeing sustained, positive results.

The George Lucas Educational Foundation

The George Lucas Educational Foundation (GLEF) is based in Nicasio, California. The Foundation researches and disseminates information about effective K–12 public schools and programs. Special emphasis is placed on the power of interactive technologies to transform learning and teaching. Further information is available on the GLEF Web site:

http://www.glef.org.

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